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ABSTRACT

The National Assessment of Educational Progress reports data about levels of educational achievement of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds in several learning areas, including art, music, literature, reading, mathematics and science. Within each age group, females' and males' levels of art achievement were compared, and sex differences were contrasted with results from the other assessment areas. In the 1974 art assessment items fell into four categories: (1) affective involvement with art; (2) cognitive activities involved with art; (3) drawing and design skills; and (4) art participation background information. Conclusions show art as not having strong female or male dominance. Males' and females' drawing skills in particular show mixed percentages of success. Neither sex at any age level was very knowledgeable about art. Attitudes toward art differ with age. Sex related patterns of achievement in art are unlike those from literature and music: females conform to popular expectations in literature and music while they do not always in art. Achievement patterns vary across ages and topics with respect to male-female dominance and the science results show consistent male dominance throughout. (GK)

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SEX DIFFERENCES IN ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT: A NATIONAL STUDY

No. 06-A-51

By Sarah S. Knight

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SEX DIFFERENCES IN ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT: A NATIONAL STUDY

by

Sarah S. Knight

Artistic endeavors known variously as fine arts, humanities, or simply "the arts" have traditionally occupied a somewhat anomalous position in any consideration of women's talents and achievements. On the one hand, it is a popular conception that women are more "sensitive" to the arts than their male peers, that they are more likely to be involved with the arts in terms of classes, attendance at events, and general support for the arts. On the other hand, female artists are not legion among renowned practitioners of any of the arts. Explanations for such conditions are many and diverse while evidence is small. The purpose of this paper is to present evidence, in the form of achievement data, pertinent to a discussion of male-female achievement differences in the arts.

This paper draws on data gathered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Each year since 1969, National Assessment has gathered information about levels of educational achievement across the country and reported its findings to the nation. National Assessment surveys the educational attainments of 9-, 13- and 17-year-olds in learning areas that include art, music, literature, reading, mathematics and science. Different learning areas are assessed every year, and all areas are periodically reassessed in order to measure change in educational achievement. Art, for example, was first assessed in 1974-75 and then reassessed during this school year (1978-79).

National Assessment results are reported for various subpopulations, such as males and females, and for the nation as a whole, so that subpopulation results can be compared with national results. Within each National Assessment age group, we will compare males' and females' levels of art achievement. Moving from age group to age group, we will examine changes in the differences between females' and males' art achievement levels as age changes. Then, sex differences in art achievement will be compared and contrasted with results from the assessment areas of citizenship, literature, mathematics, music, science and social studies.

The Art Data Base

The 1974-75 art assessment contained 64 items for 9-year-olds, 96 items for 13-year-olds and 108 items for 17-year-olds. About 90 percent of these items were given to both 13- and 17-year-olds, and about 70 percent of them were given to all three age groups.

Art items fall in four categories:

- 1) affective involvement with art (attitudes or personal orientation toward art);
- 2) cognitive activities involved with art (knowledge about art);
- 3) drawing and design skills, and
- 4) art participation background information.

Items in the affective category give a very general picture of young Americans positive or negative feelings about art, its importance, its value, and the acceptability of experimental or newer art forms. Cognitive items reflect aspects of traditional art history, general perceptions of formal characteristics of works, and judgments about a work's quality and esthetic merit. Table 1 below shows the number of items for each age group and category.

TABLE 1
Numbers of Art Items in the Assessment,
Ages 9, 13 and 17, 1974-75

	9	13	17 (in-school)
Item category			
Affective	44	51	51
Cognitive	14	38	51
Drawing	4	3	2
Background	2	4	4

Assessment results are typically reported in terms of the percentage of students in the nation who would answer a test item correctly or would answer it in a desirable manner. Results for males and females are reported as the difference between the percentage of females and the percentage of males who would be expected to answer an item correctly. Thus the difference in percentages are positive if more females in the nation would answer an item correctly and negative if more males in the nation would answer correctly.

Males' and Females' Art Achievement at Age 9, 13 and 17

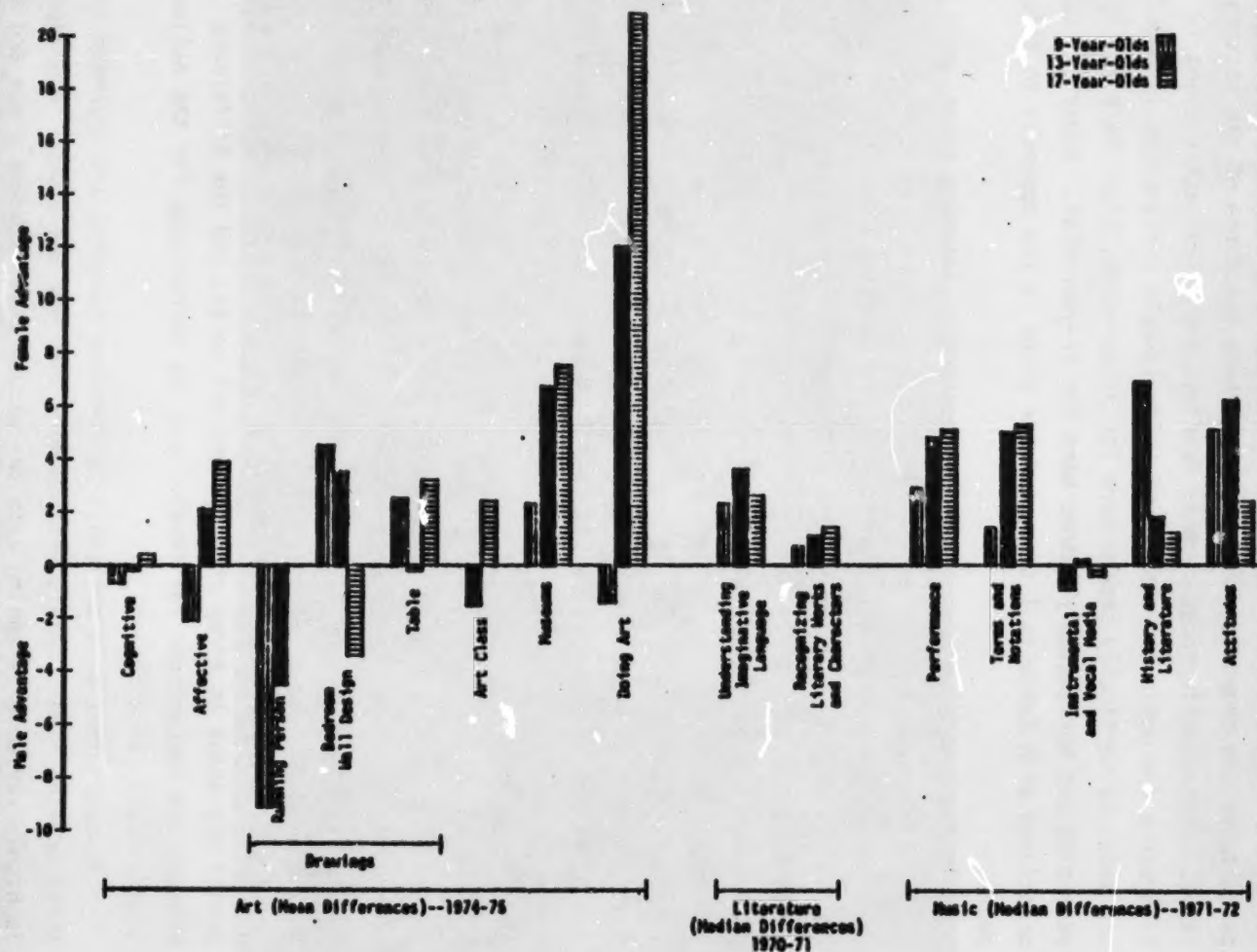
Exhibit 1 shows differences in males' and females' mean art achievement results for items in the cognitive and affective categories. Item-by-item percentages are shown for three drawing items and three of the background items. Median differences between females' and males' achievement in literature and music are also shown. Female-male differences in percentages are shown by vertically shaded bars for 9-year-olds, black bars for 13-year-olds and horizontally shaded bars for 17-year-olds. Numerical values associated with Exhibits 1 through 4 are given in the appendix to this paper.

In the cognitive aspects of most assessment learning areas, more males answer items successfully than do females. Art cognitive items as a unit do not show such clear differences. On the average, less than 50 percent of the nation's 9-, 13- or 17-year-olds know the correct or acceptable answers to the cognitive items. At age 9, higher percentages of males answer the average item successfully although the female-male difference is relatively small and the percentage of males does not differ significantly from the nation at the .05 level. Again at age 13 more males answer art items correctly but with still less difference between the sexes. A shift occurs at age 17 and females out perform males. The differences once again are small and the percentage of females is not significantly different from the nation.

If we assume that there is some factual foundation for the belief that females are more likely to view art and art works in an open and positive manner, then we should see this reflected in the affective item results. Elementary school students, 9-year-olds, do not conform to expectations. On the average male 9-year-olds show more positive attitudes. At ages 13 and 17 differences do occur as anticipated. More females say they feel positively about an array of different art works, and the difference between the percentages for females and the percentages for the nation are statistically significant.

No consistent male or female performance patterns are apparent in the three drawing items administered to more than one age group. Achievement is highly variable depending upon the actual task, student's age and sex. When students were asked to draw a running human figure, higher percentages

Exhibit 1. Mean, Median Differences between Females' and Males' Percentages of Correct or Acceptable Answers to Items or Groups of Items, Ages 9, 13 and 17, from Art, Literature and Music (See Appendix for Associated Numerical Values)



of 9- and 13-year-old males were successful in percentages that were significantly higher than the nation. Results from the other two drawing tasks are less clear.

Students at all three ages were asked to make a design for a bedroom wall, yielding mixed results. More 9-year-old females made adequate designs. Females had a better success rate at age 13 as did males at age 17.

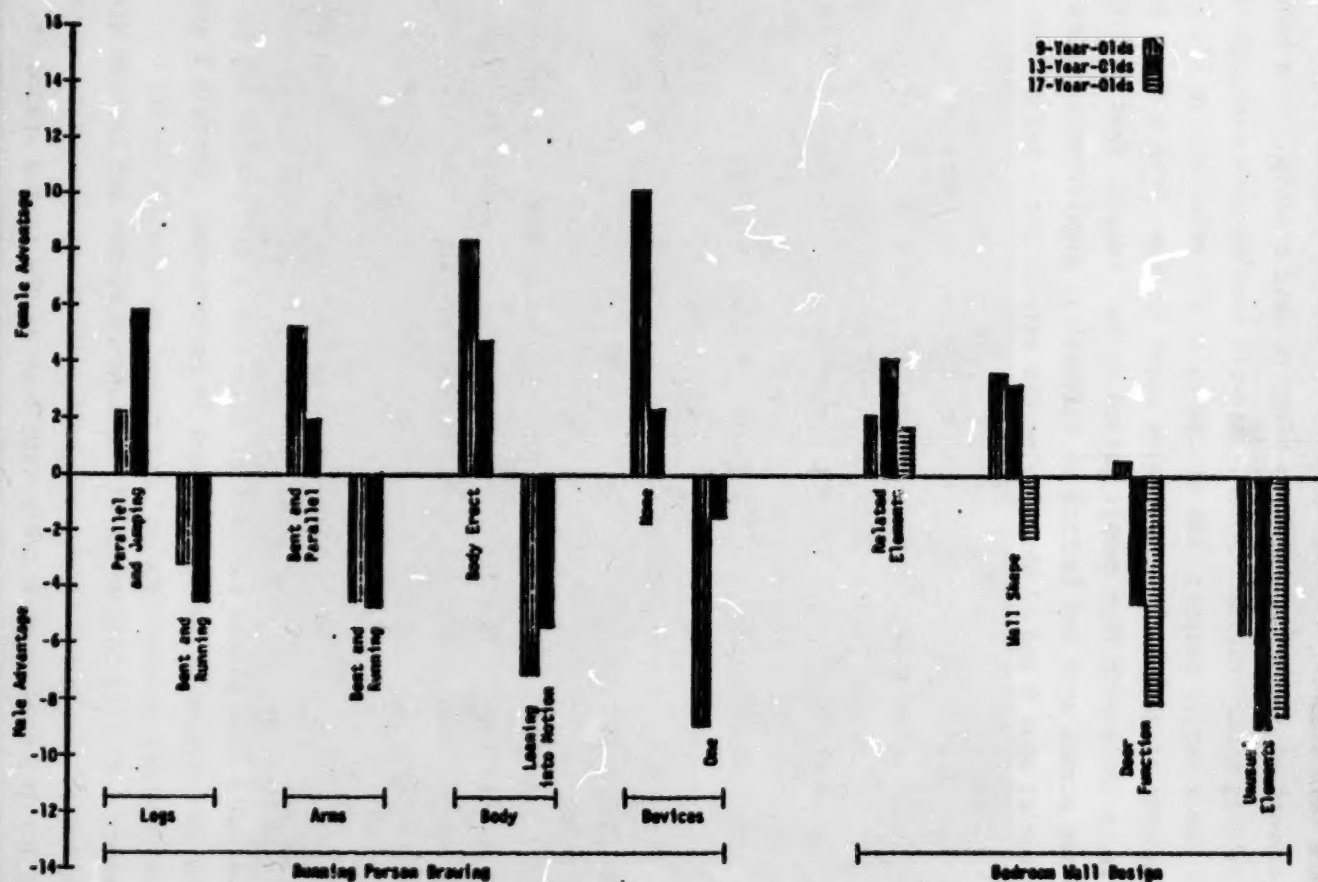
Students at ages 9, 13 and 17 were asked to draw, from a given perspective, a table with four people seated at it. Results from this task were mixed across ages and lacking in statistical significance. Females did better at ages 9 and 17 while males did only slightly better than females at age 13.

Several questions about experiences with art were asked of all students. Information about the number of types of art work students did outside of school and the frequency of their art museum or art gallery visits was gathered from 9-, 13- and 17-year-olds. All 13- and 17-year-old students were asked if they had taken an art class during the present school year. Referring to Exhibit 1, we see that slightly higher percentages of 9-year-old males report doing at least one kind of extracurricular art activity and slightly higher percentages of 13-year-old males said they were taking an art class.

Greater percentages of 13- and 17-year-old females report that they do at least two kinds of art work outside of school and more females at all three ages report that they have visited an art museum at least once. Greater participation, coupled with the increasingly large differences at older ages, may fuel the popular view of females as more active art supporters.

Drawings. Each drawing task was scored on several important and mutually exclusive categories. An examination of results for each drawing task category that showed substantial male-female differences may help to isolate the sources of sex differences in performance. Exhibit 2 shows the differences between females' and males' performance levels for selected scoring categories of the Running Person and Bedroom Wall Design tasks. Exhibit 3 shows male-female differentiating scoring categories for the drawing of a table with four people seated around it.

Exhibit 2. Differences between Females and Males, Ages 9, 13 and 17, for Selected Scoring Categories Associated with the Running Person and Bedroom Wall Design Tasks (See Appendix for Associated Numerical Values)

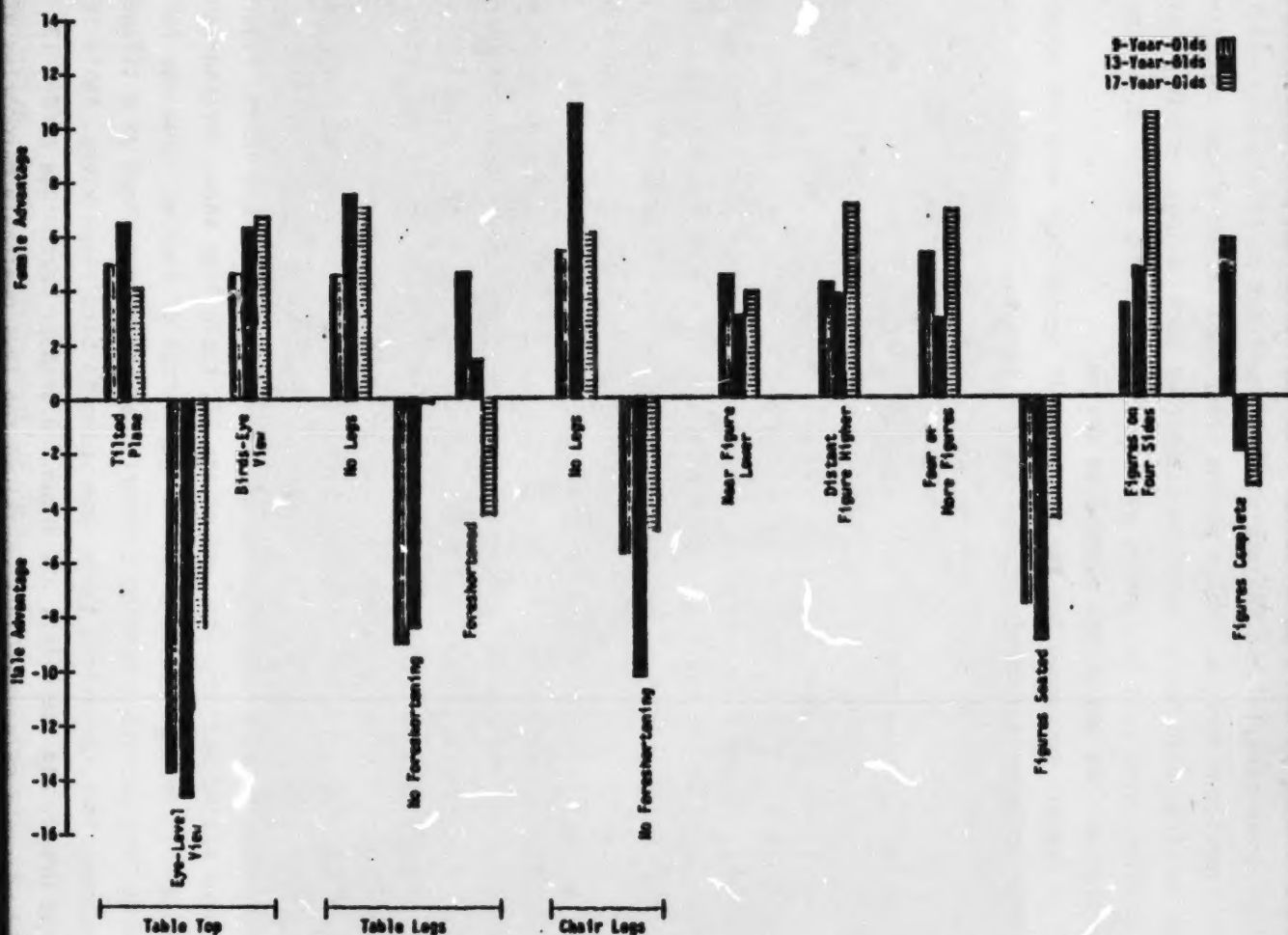


In Exhibit 2 we see that a higher percentage of females made drawings of a running person that contained less desirable response categories of legs drawn parallel, as in jumping, arms bent but parallel, body erect and no expressive devices. Males on the other hand showed higher percentages of drawings with better response categories such as legs bent in running position, arms bent in running position, body leaning in the direction of motion and the use of one expressive device.

Overall successes for the bedroom wall design task were not consistent for males and females across the age levels. More females at ages 9 and 13 made successful designs and the reverse is true at age 17. Exhibit 2 shows similar male-female inconsistencies across ages for various important bedroom wall scoring categories. A greater percentage of females at all three ages made designs containing related elements, and 9- and 13-year-old females were more likely to make designs that made full use of the wall shape. By age 17, a higher percentage of males made successful wall designs and their designs were more likely to contain an adequate use of wall shape or the use of the door as a part of the design. Although the use of novel or unusual design elements did not contribute to a successful design score, it is interesting to note that a much greater percentage of males used unusual elements in their designs at all three ages.

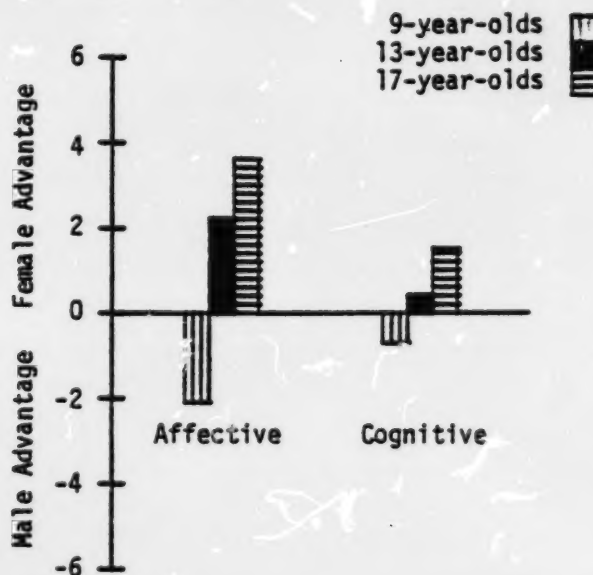
Scoring categories for Table, in Exhibit 3, show a mix of male-female achievement differences that do not have obvious connections with overall female successes at ages 9 and 17. Of the categories that showed male-female contrasts in usage, females in greater percentages gave responses falling in desirable categories such as the use of foreshortened table legs (at ages 9 and 13) near figures lower, distant figures higher and figures at four sides of the table. Males gave greater percentages of desirable responses falling in categories of table top shown at eye level, figures shown seated and complete, and at age 17, table legs shown foreshortened. At all three age levels, a greater percentage of females' drawings fell in such less desirable scoring categories as table tops shown as a tilted plane without foreshortening, table tops shown in bird's-eye views, table legs not drawn, and chair legs not drawn. A greater percentage of 9-, 13- and 17-year-old males' drawings contained the less desirable categories of table legs not shown foreshortened and chair legs not shown foreshortened.

Exhibit 3. Mean Differences between 9-, 13- and 17-Year-Old Males' and Females' Achievement for Selected Scoring Categories of Drawing Task Involving People Seated Around a Table (See Appendix for Associated Numerical Values)



Cognitive and affective art results compared across ages. Changes in the differences between males' and females' percentages of successful responses concomitant with age changes can be seen when the results from groups of items given at all age levels are compared. Differences between the sexes' percentages of correct or acceptable responses to a group of cognitive items and a group of affective items each given to 9-, 13- and 17-year-olds are shown in Exhibit 4. The set of affective items show that on the average a higher percentage of 9-year-old males evinced positive affective orientations toward art. At age 13, there is a female-male difference of similar magnitude favoring females and by age 17, female dominance is even more evident. Similar patterns of reversal and then exaggeration of the percentages can be seen for the cognitive item group. In this latter instance however, female-male differences are relatively small and neither group is significantly different from the nation at any age level.

EXHIBIT 4. Differences between Females' and Males' Mean Achievement Results for Cognitive and Affective Sets of Items Given to 9-, 13- and 17-Year-olds (See Appendix for Associated Numerical Values)



Males' and females' achievement in literature and music compared with art

We might expect that music and literature, because they too are arts, would yield achievement results similar to art. Exhibit 1 shows differences between males' and females' achievement, for literature and music as well as art. Across the two literature topics and five music topics, females dominate the achievement picture. Higher percentages of females responded in correct or desirable ways. Art, in comparison, does not yield as clear a pattern of results. At some ages, on some topics or drawing tasks, a greater percentage of females are successful but on others a greater percentage of males are successful.

The music performance topic is similar to the art production topic (drawings), music attitudes can be compared with art attitudes, and results from art cognitive items can be compared with music history and terminology results as well as with results from the two literature topics. Although the measures of central tendency for art, literature and music are different (means for art and medians for the latter two areas), trends can be compared. Exhibit 1 indicates that although much greater percentages of females knew about imaginative language, literary works and characters, music history, and music literature and terminology, greater percentages of 9- and 13-year-old males and 17-year-old females knew about art. It should also be noted that male and female differences from the nation in art knowledge are small, lacking statistical significance.

Comparing male-female results for art and music attitudes, 9-year-olds again yield dissimilar results. Although a greater percentage of 13- and 17-year-old females show positive attitudes toward both art and music, more 9-year-old males show positive attitudes about art and more 9-year-old females are oriented toward music. On art and music performance tasks, females excel in music and in some art drawing tasks at some ages. Performance results in general do not appear very similar between music and art.

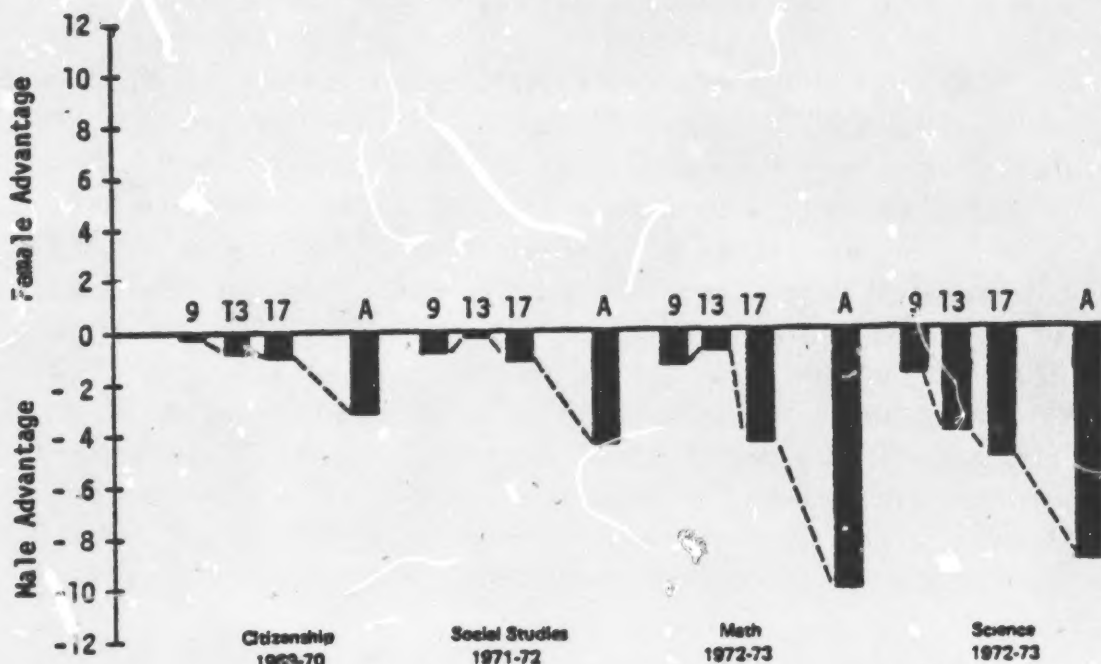
Males' and females' achievement in sciences compared with art.

Exhibit 5 shows median female-male differences in achievement for the social science areas of citizenship and social studies and the science areas of mathematics and science. These areas were assessed at the young

adult age level (26-35 years old) as well as at ages 9, 13 and 17. Differences in achievement for each of the four age groups are marked with either a number for the age or an "A" for adult.

In each of these assessment areas, more males answered the average item correctly at all age levels. Unlike art, there are consistently higher achievement levels for males across ages as well as subject areas.

Exhibit 5. Median Differences Between Females and Males, Ages 9, 13, 17 and Young Adult, in the Assessment Areas of Citizenship, Social Studies, Math and Science.



Summary

Art, considered as an area of school learning, does not show strong male or female dominance. Males' and females' drawing skills in particular show mixed percentages of success. Knowledge about art or cognitive behaviors related to art are engaged in by both sexes with roughly equivalent success. Neither sex at any age level (9-, 13- or 17-year-olds) was very knowledgeable about art. Attitudes toward art differ with age. Younger students, 9-year-olds, have a higher percentage of males with positive attitudes toward art whereas more females at 13 and 17 felt positively about it.

When compared with male-female results from literature, music, science, mathematics, social studies and citizenship, art is without peer. Sex related patterns of achievement in art are unlike those from arts like literature and music, despite superficial similarities of cognitive and affective content. In general, females conform to popular expectations in literature and music while they do not always in art. Higher percentages of females answer items acceptably across a variety of literature and music topics.

As we might anticipate, patterns of male-female results for art are also different than those for "hard" and social sciences. The achievement patterns are not however different in a consistent manner. Art results vary across ages and topics with respect to male-female dominance and the science results show consistent male dominance throughout.

APPENDIX

	<u>9-Year-Olds</u>			<u>13-Year-Olds</u>			<u>17-Year-Olds</u>		
	<u>DP¹</u>	<u>SE² of DP</u>	<u>F-M³</u>	<u>DP</u>	<u>SE of DP</u>	<u>F-M</u>	<u>DP</u>	<u>SE of DP</u>	<u>F-M</u>
Art Cognitive Items									
Male	.4	.4		.1	.2		-.2	.2	
Female	.3	.4	-.7	-.1	.2	-.2	.2	.2	.4
Art Affective Items									
Male	1.0	.3		-1.1	.2		-2.0	.3	
Female	-1.1	.3	-2.1	1.0	.2	2.1	1.9	.3	3.9
Drawing Item: Running Person									
Male	4.6	.9		2.3	1.1				
Female	-4.5	.9	-9.1	-2.2	1.1	-4.5			
Drawing Item: Bedroom Wall Design									
Male	-2.3	1.0		-1.8	1.3		1.7	1.2	
Female	2.2	.9	4.5	1.7	1.2	3.5	-1.7	1.2	-3.4
Art Background Item: Current Art Class Enrollment									
Male				.8	.8		-1.2	.5	
Female				-.7	.8	-1.5	1.2	.5	2.4
Art Background Item: Frequency of Art Gallery or Art Museum Visits									
Male	-1.1	.7		-3.4	.5		-3.8	.6	
Female	1.2	.7	2.3	3.3	.4	6.7	3.7	.6	7.5

¹DP = Percent of males and females answering an item acceptably minus the percent of all individuals in the nation who would answer acceptably.

²SE = Standard error of the difference between percent for females (or males) and the percent for the nation.

³F-M = DP for females minus DP for males, e.g., the difference between percent of females and percent of males answering acceptably.

	9-Year-Olds			13-Year-Olds			17-Year-Olds		
	DP	SE of DP	F-M	DP	SE of DP	F-M	DP	SE of DP	F-M
Art Background Item: Art Work Done Outside (at least one type at 9, at least two at 13 and 17)									
Male	.7	.6		-6.1	.4		-10.7	.6	
Female	- .7	.6	-1.4	5.9	.4	-12.0	10.1	.5	20.3
Art Affective Items Given to 9-, 13- and 17-Year-Olds (three age overlaps)									
Male	1.0	.3		-1.1	.3		-1.8	.3	
Female	-1.1	.3	-2.1	1.1	.3	2.2	1.8	.3	3.6
Art Cognitive Items Given to 9-, 13- and 17 Year-Olds (three age overlaps)									
Male	.4	.4		- .2	.4		- .8	.5	
Female	- .3	.4	- .7	.2	.4	.4	.7	.5	1.5
Literature Items on Understanding Imaginative Language (medians)									
Male	-1.2			-1.8			-1.3		
Female	1.1		2.3	1.8		3.6	1.3		2.6
Literature Items on Recognizing Literary Works and Characters (medians)									
Male	- .4			- .6			- .8		
Female	.3		.7	.5		1.1	.6		1.4
Music Items on Performance of Music (medians)									
Male	-1.5			-2.4			-2.7		
Female	1.4		2.9	2.4		4.8	2.4		5.1
Music Items on Knowledge of Music Terms and Notation (medians)									
Male	- .7			-2.5			-2.8		
Female	.7		1.4	2.5		5.0	2.5		5.3
Music Items on Knowledge of Instrumental and Vocal Media (medians)									
Male	.5			- .1			.2		
Female	- .4		- .9	.1		.2	- .2		- .4
Music Items on Music History and Literature (medians)									
Male	-3.5			- .9					
Female	3.4		6.9	.9		1.8	- .6		1.2

<u>9-Year-Olds</u>				<u>13-Year-Olds</u>			<u>17-Year-Olds</u>		
	<u>DP</u>	<u>SE of DP</u>	<u>F-M</u>	<u>DP</u>	<u>SE of DP</u>	<u>F-M</u>	<u>DP</u>	<u>SE of DP</u>	<u>F-M</u>
Music Items on Attitudes toward Music (medians)									
Male	-2.6			-3.1			-1.2		
Female	2.5		5.1	3.1		6.2	1.2		2.4
Running Person: Legs Parallel as in Jumping: Motion with Legs									
Male	-1.1	1.1		-3.0	1.5				
Female	1.1	1.1	2.2	2.8	1.4	5.8			
Running Person: Both Legs Bent and Running: Motion with Legs									
Male	1.6	.6		2.3	.9				
Female	-1.6	.6	-3.2	-2.2	.9	-4.5			
Running Person: Parallel Arms, Bent: Motion with Arms									
Male	-2.6	.8		-1.0	.9				
Female	2.6	.8	5.2	.9	.8	1.9			
Running Person: Both Arms Bent: One Forward, One Back: Motion with Arms									
Male	2.3	.4		2.4	.8				
Female	-2.2	.4	-4.5	-2.3	.7	-4.7			
Running Person: Body Erect: Motion with Body									
Male	-4.2	.9		-2.4	1.0				
Female	4.1	.9	8.3	2.3	1.0	4.7			
Running Person: Body Leaning in Motion: Motion with Body									
Male	3.6	.9		2.8	1.0				
Female	-3.5	.9	-7.1	-2.6	1.0	-5.4			
Running Person: No Expressive Devices Present									
Male	-5.1	1.0		-1.2	1.2				
Female	5.0	.9	10.1	1.1	1.2	2.3			
Running Person: One Expressive Device Used									
Male	4.5	1.1		.8	1.2				
Female	-4.4	1.0	-8.9	-.7	1.2	-1.5			

<u>9-Year-Olds</u>				<u>13-Year-Olds</u>			<u>17-Year-Olds</u>		
DP	SE of DP	F-M		DP	SE of DP	F-M	DP	SE of DP	F-M
Bedroom Wall Design: Related Elements									
Male	-1.1	1.1		-2.1	1.4		-.9	1.2	
Female	1.0	1.1	2.1	2.0	1.3	4.1	.8	1.2	1.7
Bedroom Wall Design: Wall Shape									
Male	-1.9	1.0		-1.6	1.3		1.1	1.2	
Female	1.7	.9	3.6	1.6	1.2	3.2	-1.1	1.2	-2.2
Bedroom Wall Design: Door Function									
Male	-.3	.9		2.3	.7		4.1	1.0	
Female	.2	.9	.5	-2.2	.7	-4.5	-4.0	1.0	-8.1
Bedroom Wall Design: Unusual Elements									
Male	2.9	.6		4.6	1.1		4.3	1.2	
Female	-2.7	.6	-5.6	-4.3	1.0	-8.9	-4.2	1.2	-8.5
Four People at Table: Not Foreshortened, Tilted Plane--Table Top									
Male	-2.5	1.1		-3.3	1.1		-2.1	1.0	
Female	2.5	1.1	5.0	3.2	1.0	6.5	2.0	1.0	4.1
Four People at Table: Eye-Level View--Table Top									
Male	6.9	1.2		7.4	1.1		4.3	.9	
Female	-6.8	1.1	-13.7	-7.2	1.1	-14.6	-4.1	.8	-8.4
Four People at Table: Bird's-Eye View--Table Top									
Male	-2.3	1.1		-3.2	1.2		-3.4	.7	
Female	2.3	1.1	4.6	3.1	1.1	6.3	3.3	.7	6.7
Four People at Table: No Legs Shown: Table Leg									
Male	-2.3	1.3		-3.8	1.2		-3.6	1.0	
Female	2.2	1.2	4.5	3.7	1.1	7.5	3.4	1.0	7.0
Four People at Table: Legs Foreshortened: Table Leg									
Male	-2.3	.8		-.7	1.2		2.2	1.3	
Female	2.3	.8	4.6	.7	1.2	1.4	-2.1	1.2	-4.3

	<u>9-Year-Olds</u>			<u>13-Year-Olds</u>			<u>17-Year-Olds</u>		
	<u>DP</u>	<u>SE of DP</u>	<u>F-M</u>	<u>DP</u>	<u>SE of DP</u>	<u>F-M</u>	<u>DP</u>	<u>SE of DP</u>	<u>F-M</u>
Four People at Table: Legs Not Foreshortened: Table Leg									
Male	4.5	1.3		4.3	1.4		.1	1.2	
Female	-4.5	1.2	-9.0	-4.1	1.3	-8.4	-.1	1.1	-.2
Four People at Table: Chair Leg: No Legs Shown									
Male	-2.7	1.2		-5.5	1.1		-3.1	1.0	
Female	2.7	1.2	5.4	5.3	1.1	10.8	3.0	1.0	6.1
Four People at Table: Chair Leg: Legs Not Foreshortened									
Male	2.9	1.0		5.2	1.3		2.5	1.2	
Female	-2.8	1.0	-5.7	-5.0	1.3	-10.2	-2.4	1.2	-4.9
Four People at Table: Distance-Overlap Perspective: Near Figure Lower									
Male	-2.3	1.2		-1.5	1.4		-2.0	1.3	
Female	2.2	1.2	4.5	1.5	1.3	3.0	1.9	1.2	3.9
Four People at Table: Distance-Overlap Perspective: Distant Figure Higher									
Male	-2.1	1.2		-1.9	1.3		-3.6	1.2	
Female	2.1	1.2	4.2	1.9	1.3	3.8	3.5	1.1	7.1
Four People at Table: Follow Instructions: Four or More Figures Drawn									
Male	-2.7	1.1		-1.5	1.0		-3.5	1.1	
Female	2.6	1.1	5.3	1.4	1.0	2.9	3.4	1.1	6.9
Four People at Table: Follow Instructions: Figures Seated									
Male	3.8	.9		4.5	1.2		2.3	1.3	
Female	-3.8	.9	-7.6	-4.4	1.1	-8.9	-2.2	1.3	-4.1
Four People at Table: Follow Instructions: Figures on Four Sides									
Male	-1.7	1.3		-2.6	1.1		-5.3	1.3	
Female	1.7	1.3	3.4	2.5	1.1	5.1	5.1	1.3	10.4
Four People at Table: Follow Instructions: Figures Complete									
Male	-2.9	1.3		1.0	1.3		1.7	1.3	
Female	2.9	1.2	5.8	-1.0	1.3	-2.0	-1.6	1.3	-3.3